



## Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

### **During and After a House or Building Fire**

#### **What to Do During a Fire**

- Get out as quickly and as safely as possible. The less time you are exposed to poisonous gases, the safer you will be.
- If a stove fire starts, slide a lid over the burning pan and turn off the burner. Leave the lid in place until the pan is completely cool. Using a lid to contain and smother the fire is your safest action. Getting the fire extinguisher or baking soda to extinguish the fire delays action. Flour and other cooking products can react explosively to flame and should never be sprinkled over fire. Moving the pan can cause serious injury or spread the fire. Never pour water on grease fires.
- If you try to use a fire extinguisher on a fire and the fire does not immediately die down, drop the extinguisher and get out. Most portable extinguishers empty in 8 to 10 seconds. After some residential fires, people have been found dead with fire extinguishers near them or in their arms.
- If you are escaping through a closed door, feel the door, cracks, and doorknob with the back of your hand before opening the door. If it is cool and there is no smoke at the bottom or top, open the door slowly. If you see smoke or fire beyond the door, close it and use your second way out. If the door is warm, use your second way out. It is a natural tendency to automatically use the door, but fire may be right outside. Feeling the door will warn you of possible danger.
- If you see smoke or fire in your first escape route, use your second way out. The less time you are exposed to poisonous gases or flames, the safer you will be.
- If you must exit through smoke, crawl low under the smoke to your exit. Fires produce many poisonous gases. Some are heavy and will sink low to the floor; others will rise, carrying soot towards the ceiling. Crawling with your head at a level of 1 to 2 feet above the ground will temporarily provide the best air.

- Close doors behind you as you escape to delay the spread of the fire.
- If smoke, heat, or flames block your exit routes and you cannot get outside safely, stay in the room with the door closed. Open the window for ventilation, and hang a sheet outside the window so firefighters can find you. Wait by the window for help. The first thing firefighters will do when they arrive at a fire is check for trapped persons. Hanging a sheet out lets them know where to find you. If there is a phone in the room, call the fire department and tell them where you are.
- Once you are out, stay out! Firefighters are trained and equipped to enter burning buildings. If someone is still inside, direct them to that person's probable location.
- Get out first, away from toxic smoke and gases, and then call the fire department from a neighbor's home or from an outside phone. If a portable phone is handy during your escape, you may take it with you, but do not waste precious time looking for one. Use your neighbor's phone, a car phone, or nearby pay phone to call for help.

### **What to Do After a Fire**

- Give first aid where needed. After calling 9-1-1 or your local emergency number, cool and cover burns which reduce the chance of further injury or infection. Seriously injured or burned victims should be transported to professional medical help immediately.
- Stay out of fire-damaged homes until local fire authorities say it is safe to re-enter. Fire may have caused damage that could injure you or your family. There may be residual smoke or gases that are unsafe to breathe.
- Look for structural damage. Fire authorities may allow you to re-enter, but they may not have completed a thorough inspection. Look for damage that will need repair.
- Check that all wiring and utilities are safe. Fire may cause damage inside walls and to utility lines not normally visible.
- Discard food that has been exposed to heat, smoke, or soot. The high temperatures of fire and its by-products can make food unsafe.

- Contact your insurance agent. Don't discard damaged goods until an inventory has been taken. Save receipts for money spent relating to fire loss. Your insurance agent may offer assistance for repairs and provide immediate help with living expenses until you are able to return home.

### **What to Do When Returning to Your Home**

- If there is no power, check to make sure the main breaker is on. Fires may cause breakers to trip. If the breakers are on and power is still not present, contact the utility company.
- Inspect the roof immediately and extinguish any sparks or embers. Wildfires may have left burning embers that could reignite.
- For several hours afterward, recheck for smoke and sparks throughout the home, including the attic. The winds of wildfires can blow burning embers anywhere. Keep checking your home for embers that could cause fires.
- Take precautions while cleaning your property. You may be exposed to potential health risks from hazardous materials.
  - Wetted down debris minimizes health impacts from breathing dust particles.
  - Use a two-strap dust particulate mask with nose clip and coveralls for the best minimal protection.
  - Wear leather gloves to protect hands from sharp objects while removing debris.
  - Properly handle hazardous materials such as kitchen and bathroom cleaning products, paint, batteries, contaminated fuel, and damaged fuel containers. Check with local authorities for hazardous disposal assistance.

*Adapted from resource material developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Commission for Environmental Health, CDC*